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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, June 5, 1934

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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Subject: "Canning Questions." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics,  
U. S. D. A.

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As I promised you last week, questions from home canners are to have all our attention today. As you know, home canning has been on the increase in the last few years. Many families have discovered that one way to cope with emergency times is to raise and preserve their own food. So, folks who never canned before -- both men and women, girls and even some boys -- have taken up this economy job. People are canning in their own kitchens, and they're canning in community kitchens, in cooperative canning centers, and in neighborhood groups. As a matter of fact, the home canners are really responsible for keeping starvation from the door of many a home during these past hard winters.

Well, if you're going to put up your garden and orchard foods successfully, there's just one way to go at it -- scientifically. If the foods you have worked to can are to keep and to have an attractive flavor and appearance, then you need to know exactly how to treat them. You need to plan your canning in advance, plan which foods your household will need to take you over the coming year and how much of each. Also you'll need to collect the necessary equipment to do the job well. If you haven't made a canning plan yet, now is the time to sit right down and work one out to suit the needs of your own family. If you want help in making this plan, write your State College. Canning specialists all over the country are ready to help you this year, to send free bulletins and letters of advice. Why not make the most of all this help which is yours for the asking?

The Bureau of Home Economics at Washington, D. C., also has information ready for any home canner who writes for it. You can have publications on canning fruits and vegetables, on canning meat, on preserving fruit juices, on emergency canning centers and so on. If you're planning to do any canning or preserving this year, now is also the time to fix up a little information corner on your kitchen shelf. Have a place reserved for helpful and scientific leaflets on preserving food. Then, when you need advice, you'll know right where to turn for it.

Well, let's look at some of the letters from home canners that have been arriving recently. And then let's hear what the canning specialists say in reply. Some of these questions may be the very ones that have been worrying you.

Here's a letter from a lady who wants to know if she can put fruits up without sugar. The canning specialists say, "Yes." If fruit is properly canned, it will keep from spoilage just as well without added sweetening. But the product won't be exactly the same in appearance, taste, or texture. Sugar helps preserve the shape of canned fruit. Without it, your fruit will be softer, somewhat broken down. Again, fruit preserved without sugar won't have the same color. Sugar helps hold color. To save the color, always remember to store your glass jars in a dark, cool place.



Now about canning without sugar. Just how do you go about the process? Well, if possible, can fruit in its own juice rather than in water. That gives you the maximum of flavor. You can use either the cold pack or the hot-pack method. If you pack the fruit in the jars cold, first cook up some of the riper fruit for juice. Then pour the boiling juice over the cold fruit in the jar. Or, give the fruits a short precooking and pack them in the jars hot. The less juicy fruits like apples, pears, and peaches will probably need to have water added. Either pour boiling water over them when they are cold-packed, or add water when you precook them. You can precook apples and pears by baking them and just packing them in the jars hot. As for the final processing in the hot-water bath, allow the same length of time that you allow for fruits canned with sugar.

Here's another inquiry right along this same line. A lady who has her own honey wants to know whether she can substitute honey for sugar in canning. The specialists say that you can can with honey or maple sirup or any other sweetener of this kind, but that you'll have better results if you substitute only in part -- if you use at least half sugar.

One home canner writes that she has no pressure cooker and wonders if she would be safe in canning her garden vegetables by processing in boiling water. The specialists say, "No," emphatically. They believe that no non-acid foods should be canned except under pressure. That's a hard and fast rule of theirs. And they have good reason for standing by it. To be sure, vegetables canned by the hot-water bath method often do keep. But there has been too much spoilage and waste of canned food and sometimes illness also as a result of eating improperly canned vegetables, to take chances. Fruits, which are acid, and tomatoes, also acid, are safely canned at boiling temperature. But to be sure of killing all the spoilage organisms in peas or beans or corn or asparagus or any other non-acid vegetable, you need a temperature higher than boiling. And you can only get that under pressure. If you don't own a pressure cooker, how about borrowing your neighbor's? If you can't borrow one, why not join some neighborhood group of canners where all go in on a cooperative basis? The specialists insist that you'd better not put up any vegetables at all, except tomatoes, unless you can put them up safely.

In contrast to these vegetables which require such a high temperature for sterilizing, there are the juices -- fruit juices and tomato juice, which so many people are putting up these days -- that don't even need a temperature as high as boiling. As a matter of fact, boiling spoils their fresh flavor and isn't necessary for sterilizing them because they are liquid, easy for the heat to penetrate, and they're also acid. Well now briefly, the way you put up these juices is this: First, extract the juice as you do for jelly. Strain it and add sugar, if you care to. Sugar isn't necessary for preserving the juices, but it does help keep the color and flavor. Now heat the juice to the simmering point. Then pour it into hot sterilized bottles, almost to the top but not quite, since the heating may cause it to expand. Seal the bottles and set them in a hot water bath that covers them -- comes at least two inches above the top. Heat the water to the simmering point for ten minutes. Now your juice is ready to store away.

As we mentioned before, if you want all the details on bottling fruit juices or on any other canning process, write to the Bureau of Home Economics at Washington, D. C. This information is yours for the asking.

